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ABSTRACT

This paper on instructional development notes the trend toward teaching improvement efforts, classifies instructional development centers in terms of their differing philosophies of operation, and identifies some general problems that have been encountered in institutional efforts to improve teaching and learning. Centers in North America, Europe, and Australia can be classified as reflecting broad trends or models. The "clinical/psychotherapeutic" approach offers a consultative service to faculty for advice and assistance with teaching problems. The "research institute" approach acts primarily as a center for empirical investigations of the teaching-learning process. The "consultant/facilitator" approach provides consultation on a wide variety of issues related to teaching and learning and provides general workshops. The "general service center" provides all the services of the other approaches, including research and consultation for individual faculty. Some general problems and concerns of instructional development activities are academic freedom, the kinds of research conducted, social change and personal development educational objectives, and the danger of token efforts. When feedback to faculty members is provided by colleagues or administrative superiors, some faculty feel that the traditional right to teach without interference is endangered. Research conducted through instructional development centers needs to be relevant to the teaching process of the particular university. (SW)

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FASHIONS IN INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT*

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The past decade has seen an increasing pressure on universities to examine and improve the quality of their teaching. This pressure has come from Government (it is part and parcel of the demand for "accountability" in education), from students and, to a certain extent, from university teachers themselves.

"Instructional development" is one of the numerous terms coined in recent years to describe organized efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning. (For a further description of the term and listing of other labels and approaches to teaching improvement, see Lindquist, 1978.) A concern with such questions can obviously be traced back to the origin of the university as a teaching institution. However, it is in comparatively recent times that there has been a shifting away from the almost total preoccupation with the content of instruction towards an added concern for the methods of instruction as they relate to different learning outcomes.

Two manifestations of this increasing interest in the quality of education on the part of faculty, students and administrators in North American universities of the 1960's were the growing use of student course ratings to evaluate teaching and the setting up of university-wide committees on teaching and learning. In Great Britain a somewhat different approach was adopted with the institution of training programmes and courses in teaching for incoming faculty. All of these developments provided a favourable climate for the creation of instructional development centres, which could be used, as the situation demanded, to co-ordinate the results of student evaluations, to provide training for faculty and to undertake research and development activities that was not possible for a volunteer committee.

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Such centres developed in many parts of the Western world, performing a variety of roles related to the institutional and cultural climate as well as

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the predilections of the centre's director and staff. In 1974, when the writer made a tour of selected universities in North America, Europe and Australasia, he found established centres in most Australian universities and one embryonic unit in New Zealand. A number of well established units existed in various Western European universities, such as Utrecht and Hamburg (for a more complete account of the situation in Europe see Entwistle, 1976; and Sheffield, 1973), although relatively few existed in Great Britain -- the University Teaching Methods Unit of the University of London being the notable exception. Canadian centres were virtually non-existent, apart from McGill University's Centre for Learning and Development, but in the USA there were many well known units, of which Michigan State University's Educational Development Program and the Center for Instructional Development at Syracuse University are two of those that remain prominent.

Although the orientation of the different organizations naturally varied according to local needs and philosophies, there were many activities in common. For example most centres sponsored workshops and seminars, most maintained a collection of resource material for consultation by faculty, and many produced a regular newsletter on aspects of teaching and learning. A large number of centres also offered a consultative service to individual faculty members with respect to their classroom instruction.

Of more interest, however, are the differences between units. Many of the organizations had additional responsibilities thrust upon them at the moment of their creation: hence one Australian centre was responsible for the running of a computerized student testing service that monopolized a large part of its personnel and budget. Much more common was the assignment to a teaching and learning unit responsibility for providing audio visual services that had previously been offered within a separate organization. Some units organized study skills programmes and spent large parts of their time in direct contact with

students, with others providing services almost exclusively to instructors. At the same time, in some of the Scandinavian centres the practice of involving students and faculty together in the instructional development process was common. Sources of funding varied between centres: outside the USA (and to some extent Great Britain) funding tended to be largely from within the budget of the institution itself, whereas many American units received large scale financial support from independent foundations. This has recently had an unfortunate effect on the longevity of some centres who have had to cease their activities when external financial support disappeared and internal funding was not forthcoming (see Mathis, 1978).

It is difficult to classify instructional development centres in terms of their differing philosophies of operation since no individual unit fits neatly into a particular category. Nonetheless it is possible to identify broad trends or "models". One such model can be labelled the "clinical/psychotherapeutic" approach[1] which offers a consultative service to where faculty can go for advice and assistance with regard to teaching problems. An inherent disadvantage here relates to the inevitable impression that the "clinic" is only for those instructors who are experiencing difficulties, and this raises a problem common in clinical settings that generally the client must first recognize his "deficiencies" before he will seek advice. Somewhat more common is the "research institute" approach[1] in which the unit acts primarily as a centre for empirical investigations of the teaching-learning process. This has many attractions in a university setting where research and scholarship has high credibility; the model also has inherent difficulties, some of which are mentioned below. Perhaps the two most successful models are the "general service centre" and the "consultant/facilitator" approach[1]. In the latter the centre staff are available for consultation on a wide variety of issues related to teaching and learning, and attempt to facilitate instructional development across the institution by arranging general workshops

and identifying faculty throughout the university who can in turn be called upon to give advice on pedagogical matters: sometimes such faculty are given official status (and compensation) by secondment to the centre. The general service centre, which is probably the most common model, attempts to combine the best of all possible worlds by providing all of these services, including research and consultation for individual faculty. Both the latter models have the advantage of being flexible and capable of responding to a wide variety of individual needs. However, they are not without their critics. For example, Rose (1977) has argued forcefully that instructional development will fail unless it is based on a systematic assessment of specific institutional goals, agreed upon by all the members of the university concerned. Hence she sees effective instructional development as involving major efforts to identify instructional objectives and to achieve faculty consensus about such aims before programmes to improve teaching can be implemented.

Some General Problems and Concerns

Irrespective of the particular difficulties faced by individual instructional development centres operating in terms of the models described above, some general problems can be identified on the basis of an examination of the institutional efforts to date to improve teaching and learning in universities.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM. Most attempts at improving teaching necessitate some form of feedback to the individual teacher, but when this feedback is provided by colleagues, or administrative superiors (such as the department head), then some faculty may feel that the traditional right of the professor to teach without interference is endangered. This problem may never arise where there is a genuine interest in obtaining the opinion and help of one's peers: but it is a different matter when classrooms are "inspected" with a view to obtaining information which can be used in tenure, promotion or merit hearings. There is no easy answer to the question of assessing effective teaching that can both

guarantee the academic freedom of the individual faculty member and provide the university with a means of ensuring that teaching is indeed effective, and continues to improve. It is clear, however, that a number of attempts to evaluate teaching have been extremely ham-fisted, and faculty members have rejected such efforts fairly strenuously on the grounds that their freedom to teach was being infringed. Most of the directors of advisory units on teaching are now extremely careful about the way they approach individual faculty and departments, and are reluctant to advise faculty, unless a direct and positive invitation has been received from the faculty member concerned. They are generally conscious of the need to keep information confidential, and it would appear that this is the only possible approach at present, even though this may not be welcome to university administrators who wish the teaching function be made "accountable."

IDIOSYNCRATIC RESEARCH. A good many of the formal units that have been set up to improve university teaching have considerable involvement in research, generally done by psychologists or educationists; there is also a significant amount of research into teaching done by interested individuals who have no formal qualifications in education or connections with a research unit. Whether a unit should be principally advisory or research oriented has been an active debating point amongst unit directors for several years, often leading to interesting debates about a unit's title. It seems to the present writer that both functions are clearly necessary. At the same time many of the units which pride themselves on the quality of their research are in danger of embarking on research projects that may serve the ambitions of the individual investigators rather more than serve the needs of the university teaching community. Some units seem to have been successful in producing a string of research findings of publishable quality, but one is left with the impression that the overall objectives of the unit lack coherence, and particularly lack any relevance to problems which are being encountered day by day in the institution concerned.

It would seem more sensible to link research with the specific situations which appear to be most relevant to the teaching process of the particular university where the unit is located. Where this has been done -- often involving collaboration between unit staff and faculty members in a particular discipline -- the research results are not only valuable in their own right, but serve an additional purpose in stimulating genuine interest amongst teaching colleagues who have encountered similar problems.

SOCIAL ACTION AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT. If unit directors are asked which parts of the university are most receptive to their efforts, they usually reply that the medical, engineering, and natural science faculties are the most interested, with humanities lagging rather behind, and social sciences bringing up the rear. It is also generally admitted that although there is a pocket of resistance from many senior and older faculty members, some of the most recently qualified university teachers occasionally show marked hostility to the notion that something could be done to help them in their teaching role. Many younger faculty in the social sciences regard universities very differently from their more traditional colleagues. They see the institution not as a place of scholarship, but as a political force and an agent for social change; they may also regard university teaching as having the objective of fostering personal development even more than intellectual development. Naturally, these ideas do not always go together (though in many cases they do). It is not being suggested here that teaching for social development or political change is unamenable to improvement. However, the faculty member who has social change/personal development objectives may regard advice from the traditional sources (including his department head and any official unit that may exist) with suspicion if not downright antagonism. This point is linked to the question of to what extent improving teaching effectiveness within traditional models maintains the <u>status quo</u>.

TOKENISM AND THE ESTABLISHMENT. There is no doubt that the topic of improving teaching effectiveness is an extremely fashionable one at present -- especially with university presidents. Induction courses for new (and even old) faculty abound, and there has been a great increase in the number of formally established instructional development units. (One interesting paradox here is that there is a dearth of suitably qualified people to take up positions in the units once established.) A danger with all this rapid enthusiasm is that the establishment on paper of a course, a committee or a research enterprise can often lead to a false sense of security that "something is being done," while in fact the great bulk of faculty are untouched by the central issues until they are confronted by an urgent personal teaching problem of their own. Nearly all of those professionally engaged in the evaluation and improvement of teaching are conscious of the fact that once they are identified with the university "establishment" they are doomed as far as making any real inroads into the problem with rank and file teachers is concerned. Unfortunately, many senior university administrators do not seem to be very conscious of this problem and are only too happy to be able to boast that they have a training course for faculty (no matter how uninspiring or irrelevant this may be), a "committee on effective teaching" (although it may rarely meet and never conduct other than purely theoretical discussions), or a fine new research and advisory unit which occupies itself principally with the sort of idiosyncratic research criticised above, and rarely provides advice because it is never asked. The point here is an obvious one: that the improvement of teaching is something that has to take place at a grass-roots level and involve the whole university community working together -- students, faculty, and administration.

All this leads to the question of objectives — a favourite slogan of those in the teaching effectiveness enterprise. It is the writer's contention that perhaps too much fruitless attention has been given to the question of

the objectives of a particular class or course, and too little to the objectives of the university and of education in general. If the current preoccupation with evaluation of an individual course were to be transformed into a real concern about the underlying philosophy and rationale of university education then perhaps some real progress could be made in the vital questions of improving the quality of our teaching.

Note

1. The four models proposed here resemble in some ways the three strategies of instructional development suggested by Mathis (1978). The "clinical/psychotherapeutic" model generally corresponds to what Mathis calls "faculty development", the "research institute" model relates to the strategy of "study and dissemination" in higher education, and Mathis' term "instructional development" has a similar meaning to the "general service centre" model. The "consultant/facilitator" approach is a blend of instructional development and faculty development, in Mathis' terms.

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